
Transition of Distance between Livelihoods and Water : “Ritually Near” Well Water and “Pseudo-near” Water Supply in Modern and Post-war Okinawa

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How did people live with daily water and ritual water, and how did the distance between people and water change in Okinawa Main Island during the modern and post-war periods? Okinawa Island is naturally short of water resources. Due to the PFAS contamination problem and the risk of water supply restrictions due to low rainfall (2023–2024), concerns about water have not been completely dispelled.

In this paper, we will discuss the following topics related to water on Okinawa Island: the water situation in the old Naha City from the Taisho period to the early Showa period, around the time the water supply was opened in 1933. results of a 1968 survey on customs related to water in the prefecture, post-war policy to send water resources from the northern to the urban areas in the south-central part of the main island, and abandonment of the local simple water supply system. In the discussion, we will refer to ‘Near Water’ and ‘Far Water’ theory of Yukiko Kada, or Kenichiro Moritaki . People have been living by managing and using ‘local water’ themselves. After that, from the 1960s onwards, Japan shifted to a water supply system that relied on ‘distant water’, both in terms of management and distance. Okinawa Island is naturally poor in water resources, so its reliance on distant water sources has caused water shortages not only in the urban areas of Naha, but across the whole of Okinawa Island. In particular, large-scale water restrictions were imposed from July 1981 to June 1982. We can learn about the actual situation at the time based on the materials from that time and the testimonies have obtained through fieldwork today. The water tanks introduced to avoid water shortages have blended into the urban landscape. However, they were merely a means of keeping distant water as a pseudo-close water.

The village rituals for the former water source are still being carried on today by the local organization. However, the wells worshipped are no longer the source of water for daily livelihoods. These wells are given the context of the water that having enriched the livelihoods of ancestors.

Key words: ‘Near Water’ and ‘Far Water’, “ritually near” water, “pseudo-near” water, water supply restriction, water tanks